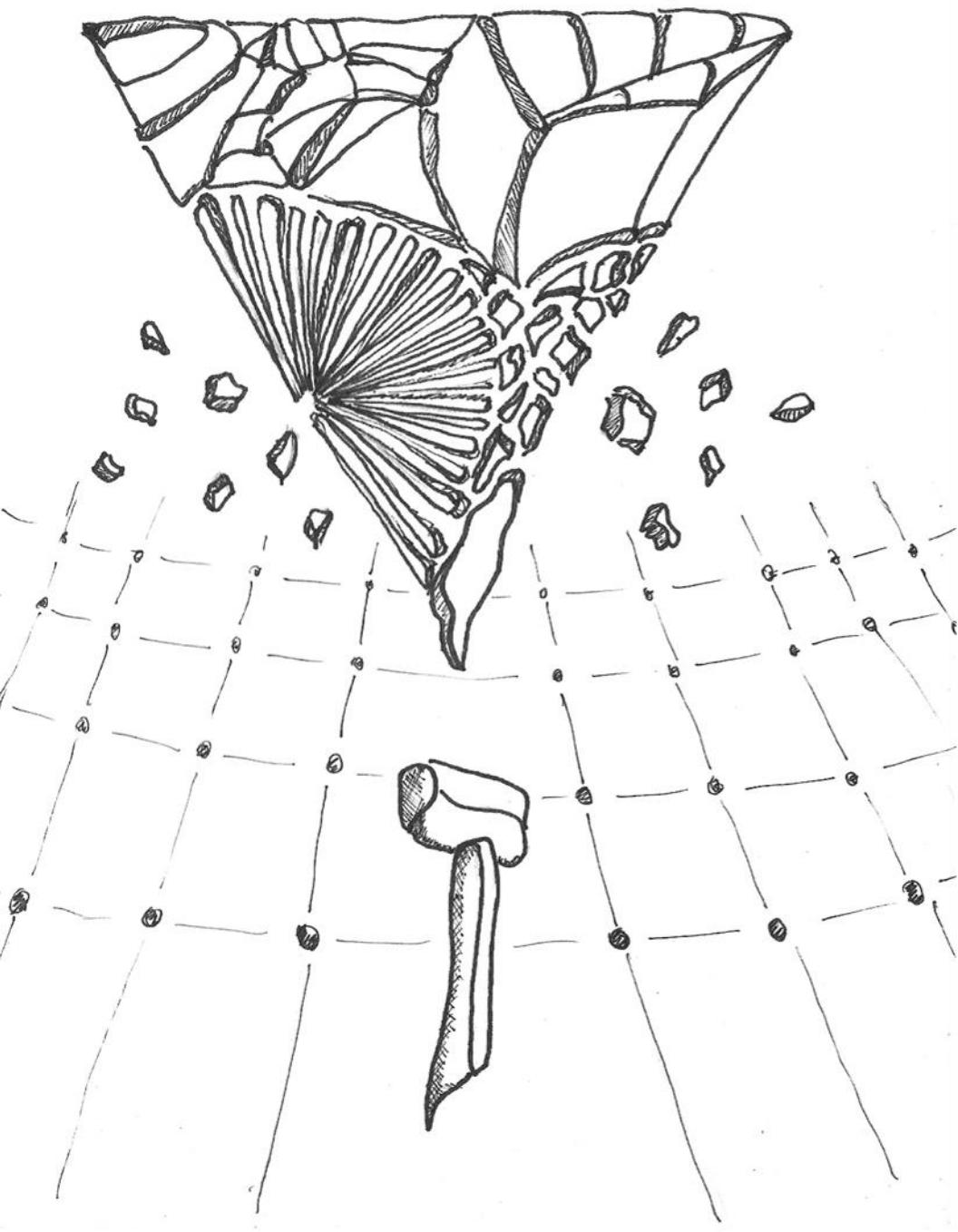


Dispatches from
Triangulum

Ignatius



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I'll never be able to tell you
what you've meant to me
not in earnest, the words don't exist
 not in any language I've found
Even if they did
I'm not sure you'd want to know
So I'll say it here
 for everyone and for no one
That you've kept me alive
kept me fighting for something
when it was cold and dark
I love you for that
and for a million things
that you will never hear me say
but I hope you know

MARCH

1.

It all travels at a finite speed
at a definite velocity
Nothing is instantaneous
our bodies, our vehicles, our voices, our light
Andromeda
our closest galactic neighbor
lies 2.573 million light years away
So
if some amateur astronomer out there
pointed their telescope to earth
today
right now
they would see an ice age
Maybe an early bipedal humanoid
use fire
Though even that is unlikely
They would need to watch our planet
for two million five hundred and seventy thousand years
before they would know
that you
or I
ever existed
Before the particles of light
that emanated from the thousands of fires that raged this summer
would reach their eyes

Some days I'm struck by
an intense heartache at this thought
that we will never be witnessed in
our reality, only as a holograph
kept at a time constrained distance
from even those closest to us

How even if the sun were to disappear
in an instant we
would still live in ignorance
for a full eight minutes before we had
even the slightest idea
of our impending collapse

But other days I find these
same thoughts an inspiration
or at least a comfort
That perhaps the collapse of the
institutions of our suffering
is also imminent, existent
separated through some temporal space
and we are just ignorant
of how close it is
of how delicate our predicament
of where we need to look
to find the cracks in our cages

2.

They shot a man over a pizza
cause he ran when they sprinted towards
him with guns drawn
So we stand in this Sheetz parking lot
Not more than 75 of us and as many cops
Heard there are others by the chief's house
demanding justice
Heard the lights are off

We make it downtown
some folks try to give speeches
A woman gets on a megaphone
candidate for city council I think
She demands peaceful protest
crowd tells her to fuck off
Two flags get cut down
on fire as we pass by
Window shatters and a car alarm goes off
A young man holds someone's photo
Begs police to look
to recognize him as human
They don't react
Nothing but shields and helmets and boots
There's a standoff as I walk to my car
Everyone makes it out as far as I know
Stop on the way home
Soda and a sandwich

3.

It looks the same but smaller
A biopsy of the future
put under a microscope
It's the same pain, same emotion
Could've been then
But it wasn't

4.

The kids were excited
for a few weeks
Extended spring break being
the only change they saw
I made plans with old friends
set up a few calls
Commiserated over the state of the world
Took bets like we did in school
on the chances of snow days
or delayed openings
None of us won this time
Stopped keeping track
when the reports came out of
Brooklyn, Iselin, Tenafly
We worried about our parents
and grandparents if we still had them
Called once a week
but the dead space was heavy
At least we didn't have to wear
masks over zoom

5.

Sometimes I wish I drank
If for no other reason than to
have some way to kill time
when it appears without warning
Caught off guard by the length of the day
Instead I let my eyes lose focus
blend the paintings on the wall
remember to blink as tears start to roll
Salt caught on lips
Chest trembles
Weather the tremor
Unclench jaw
Catch my breath from the marathon I've been running
every morning this week
Turn the page of the book on my lap unsure of when I opened it
no concern for the content
Start over again
 But dad drinks

APRIL

1.

Shared the idea before thinking it through
Make a “mutual aid” fund
with the goal to keep it
perpetually empty, no balance
no future plans beyond
how do we distribute this cash
as fast as possible
Hit up the professors
who have no concept of solidarity
outside of writing a check
but we’ll take a check

A few grand in the first week
a few more in the second
The requests pick up
We never have enough to meet them all
We get scammed a few times
but it is what it is
We do our best
spending hours fighting with
a faceless voice on the phone
over holds on our accounts
they don’t even have authority to remove

The requests keep piling up
no way to put a hold on
a utility payment
a water bill
and groceries
or gas
or groceries
or diapers
or groceries

Each morning I check the emails
from folks desperate
no more job
electricity turned off
running out of food
And we tell them we don't
have the funds right now
but there are other resources
We're so sorry
And they're always so gracious
but sorry doesn't help us keep warm

Fifteen grand we raised and distributed
in four weeks, eleven months ago
We still get emails
Phone calls
begging for help
I don't sleep much those nights

2.

Face down on the hardwood (actually linoleum)
Feel my weight press my ribcage
into the ground
Believe if I am to focus hard enough
I might sink beneath the foundation
and disappear
Keep moving until I hit water
stop for a bit to hydrate
Continue downward
Pass the crust
into and through the mantle
Reach the core and boil off
Rise back up through the channels
of molten rock
Reemerge as a plume of ash
from a devastating eruption in Turkey or Japan
or New Jersey
Instead I sneeze from the dust
under my fridge
and gather the composure to make lunch

3.

Cut my palm
slicing through an onion
Didn't realize the knife was so sharp
took a second to start bleeding
a second longer to start hurting
Deep, pink
It will scar
it does

4.

My mom calls to check in
to ask how I'm doing
If I'm keeping safe
and eating alright
I lie and say I'm good
I am
and that I'm learning to cook all kinds
of new dishes

The last one is more an
exaggeration than a lie
She worries, and I don't want to make
that any worse
Says she wishes she could touch me
see my face
to find some peace of mind
I don't call enough
I know that
But it's good to hear her voice
Hear her complain about work
or the neighbors
like life is still happening
somewhere out there

MAY

1.

I never watched the video
First, because I couldn't
then there was no need
The events already on every channel
broken down second by second
a slow motion replay on sports center
Experts read the details of
the minutes long torture and murder
of a man
crying out for his mother

2.

I hold my breath
for days and my chest hurts
Less because of what happened
more because of what's coming
Something is different
I don't know what
but it is
There is a rumbling in the cages
Fingernails start to fall off
I don't think they realize
What it is they're dealing with

3.

They fucking did it
They really fucking did it
No asking for meetings, no deference to process
No vanguard no analysis no consensus
Nothing but righteous audacity

Their hands hold the scars
that spell out their role
And their records marked with their courage
for the paintings they made
with gasoline

4.

News says fifteen thousand people
were in the streets to start the afternoon
In front of the courthouse, on its steps
Need to hang back from the crowd
I've never been good at listening to speeches
puts me on edge for some reason

We start marching
Or the crowd does
Still hanging back, trying to spot
familiar faces, for some comfort
The heat is unbearable and I'm not carrying enough water
Nobody is

The march splits around a park
I take a break to walk under the trees
Shade isn't much respite but it keeps
me on the side
more room to move, to breathe

Put my hands to the dirt
let my palms sink in a bit
beneath the dust and pine needles
Try to find some center of things
remind myself that I exist
before I lose my body again

We follow the group that goes right
A friend and I
couldn't give an explicit reason
but it's easier to walk downhill
Cops form a riot line ahead
we keep walking
and then we stop
No shade but a few clouds rolling in

We stand at this corner
facing the riot line
Vacant lot to our right
graffiti on a lone, fenced in, wall
And the downtown jail on our
left, some folks are getting antsy

Bottles are let loose
I wish they'd throw bricks instead
and drink the water
but they're brave
and that's all that matters

Sheriffs come out from the garage
Must be where the bottles were headed
Some bold motherfuckers rush up
make it inside
get beat back

The first cannister of the night
is thrown into the crowd of the day
and children start to scream
Their parents are confused, some scream as well
The city police at the corner don't retreat
but there is red smoke now
Traffic cones make it into the street
We've all seen the videos

5.

Acted on instinct
Threw it back without a thought
And I scream, cry for help
as skin starts to slough off
But someone is there
Sweet and calm
Bandaged up with a glove
It'll hurt in the morning
It'll hurt worse in the morning

6.

Always at a corner
Confrontations are always at a corner
Never in the middle of the street
where we could drag them
to our side
Make them choke as we've choked
cry as we've cried
crack them as they've cracked us
“Hands up Don’t Shoot”
The crowd chants as a threat
more than a plea
Older man, white T-shirt
says fuck that “Shoot Back”
I smile and he sees, we
have a small embrace before we turn back
to face the riot line
comrades for the night

7.

Of what use is the voyeur to the riot
The man who wanders about with camera pointed
As if to shield his eyes from the glare
or halo
of the presentation before him
The line of the crowd, mob, passerby
is blurred as characteristics are shared
by inhabitants of the assumed personas

And so where does the voyeur position herself
to herself
for herself
What is to be done for the woman
Incapable of taking action of her own
content to live within a constructed fantasy
even as cataclysmic reality beckons

Why are they here
What do they want
Do they want
Can they even see us

8.

Glass, breaking all around
reflections shattered into fractals
of pain and of reclamation
of space and of self
Nothing anyone can do to stop it

9.

Need to sit
legs cramping
haven't eaten in two days
and out of water
Stranger offers theirs, drink with greed
Smoke flows down the alley
Coughing follows
but too tired to move
A crowd gathers, exhausted
Heat has long outlasted the sun
Riot line moves up and we stand
Nobody has enough water
to make it through another
barrage
A miracle cuts through the gas
first as light
then as body
Young men in a truck call me over
Get it out of the bed, fast
No fewer than a hundred cases
of fresh water
We pull it into the street
While cops pull up in a cart
Truck speeds off
Hope they made it home
We have water
We can fight a little longer

10.

Crowd is far away now, maybe gone entirely
I'm alone, trying to leave
I look for stars but my eyes
are so burned, everything is a smudge
Stumble towards where I parked
A single city cop
directing traffic
at two in the morning
Looks at me
says nothing but knows
and we ignore each other
too tired to worry about the other

11.

At home I hear they took a highway
Guess that's what I get for
going right at the park, choosing downhill
Missed them taking a highway
Could've used the exercise

JUNE

1.

Woke up the next morning
with no sheets on the bed
Kicked them off while working through
a cramp in the night
The sun is coming in through the blinds
Someone asks if I'm going back tonight
Reply that I don't feel up for it
but I'll drop off some water
for folks in the street

2.

Highway is open
Radio coming in clear
The world is ending
ended
the old world

Movies told me to expect
bumper to bumper traffic
when the apocalypse comes
arrives
the apocalypse

I can see a mile ahead
at least that far behind
But I can't see the fires
rage
as they burn

The world is ending
while the radio plays
today's top 40 hits
like
any other day

3.

Carrying a case of water
awkward, downtown
looking for the crowd
Heard they were by the mansion
It's not too far so
I'll check it out
just for a bit

A few clouds overhead but
the sky is mostly blue
Air is still heavy with
the events of the night before
Crowd is already hot
shaking a fence keeping them from
an empty building
But they keep on down the street

The pigs start putting on their riot gear
in an empty parking lot
behind the state bar
They were cops yesterday
but today they're pigs
No real difference
but I hope they hurt today
moreso than usual I guess

Pigs block the march on a corner
 always on a fucking corner
Not city this time, state troopers
Their gear fits better
I hate them for that
 for everything

They pull the pin on their
gas cannisters
while a man in the crowd
turns towards us
and demands peace

The second you turn
your back on the pigs
to face the crowd
to make demands
you're more them than us
and you'll get what's coming too

But the pin is already pulled
there won't be any peace
we don't want that anyway

4.

They roll the first one out
singing in soprano
I run up
shoe burns, toe breaks
nail turns black a week later
but that pig jumped
and I saw, in his eyes, he knew fear
Fear of present pain
of future affliction
of what this crowd
could make happen
could destroy
if we rattle the cage
to the point
of rupture

5.

I turn as the gun goes off
I feel pain
Deep
Takes away
the heavy air I had
managed to force into my lungs
I groan and fall into the crowd
afraid to look down
But the pain subsides
just a rubber bullet
Don't notice the blood till
a few hours later
when a friend asks if I'm okay

It bleeds for a month
Had to throw away my sheets

6.

There is a calm
within a moment of rebellion
within a riot
that finds its space to breathe
When the world moves around you
at a million miles an hour
too fast to process
and you don't try to process it
because despite the gas and smoke
it's the closest you've ever felt
to understanding where
you are supposed to be

7.

A woman walks her friend over in my direction
Eyes closed and crying, asks for a flush
She livestreams the process and boasts
about learning tactics, and I'm happy for her
To feel pride in learning something new
We're in a park and the moon shines through the haze
Crew of teens runs up, looking for water
They're beaming, outshining the moon
One says We just hit up a jewelry store
and pulls a necklace out of their pocket
I'm busy helping their friend
but they see me grin
And I shake my head
Tell them I'm proud but please
keep your lips tight
I don't want to see you on the news
I want you to feel this way again
and again

8.

It's 3am and I stop at a gas station
a few miles outside of downtown
far enough to just be some drifter
passing through on their way to Atlanta
or whatever is beyond this town

I stop because I need something to eat
Blood feels heavy with lead
Brain is swollen or toxic or both
Settle on two ice pops, blue and green

The kind you'd eat while leaning against
your neighbor's above ground pool
the week before school starts for the fall

Limp back to the car, half sit on the hood
Knees shake, shirt torn, still bleeding
still burned
still smell like long expired barbecue
Waking dream about how good that shower will feel
when I can stand
hopefully in the morning

9.

Folks wanna light up the smaller city
but the tinder got wet and
the logs won't catch
Creation of a liberal mythos is good for that
Progressive after progressive stands before a crowd
Preaches

We're different than our neighbor down 40
Our cops don't get caught on film
pulling their guns on children
 they do that shit in the dark
Our cops keep the riot line out of sight
 behind the fence for now
Our protestors are peaceful
Our protestors are polite, conscientious
Anyone who dares challenge that
is an outsider, not of us
cast them out
turn them over

And so the myth takes hold

10.

An argument in the middle of the street
about militance, about who's to blame
when the cops crack skulls
Some folks wanna take the highway
others feel that's too far
So we split, not missing a highway again
A small, vocal crowd heads down the exit
and we sing and chant to the oncoming headlights
flanked by cars of our own, blasting music

Make our way back to regroup
but folks are moving towards us
Shaken up
stammering about cops in riot gear
 So we pull down goggles
 Pull up bandanas
 Stuff hands into gloves
 Get ready to do what it is we do
But a woman grabs me
tries to pull me out of the crowd
Says I'm just looking for trouble
that I need to leave
that she'll force me to leave

Try to ignore her but she
steps in front of us
pulling at our arms
Ask her to stop, please
to give me space, let me go
but she refuses
The crowd is in two minds
one panicked, another prepared
and neither seems capable
of communicating with the other
Only the former seems bent
on enforcing their will on the latter

Days of every news station in the country
decrying the rioting and looting
as the work of outside agents
of undercovers, of anarchists
has rotted away all sense of reality
There is no discussion to be had
with someone convinced they're
staring down the boogeyman
Just do your shit and keep moving

11.

First attempt

A rope gets tied around the neck of the statue
Barely two tugs before the cops swarm
Some liberal on a speaker screaming
“This isn’t how we do things”
towards those doing things
So I trip over the cord to his microphone
unplug his sound system

12.

Second attempt

It’s darker and the ropes are thicker
A person climbs the obelisk
and gives a boost with his legs
A now familiar groan generates
an excited panic as folks know
what comes next
First one, then the other
Two soldiers of bronze eat dirt
They get dragged through the street
like some eclectic funeral procession
One is hung from a lamp post
the other dumped on the
steps of the courthouse
The cops complain, tell us to get back
We laugh
as it starts to rain

JULY

1.

Calls go out for numbers in the street
Billed as an occupation
served as a picnic
on the sidewalk instead of a park
Across from an empty house
that we'll scream at for days to come
Emotions are higher
than the situation would appear to generate
Word of a mass arrest
earlier in the day
first in a month or so
Whole scene reeks of civil disobedience
I can stomach that for a night
Gets harder when I meet
the self-appointed security team
When they tell me to
leave the nazi who walked up alone
Tell me they'll handle the situation
By handle they mean ignore
Don't tell me not to curb
a fucking nazi

2.

Spend the night to support
the work of younger folks
getting their feet under them
End up talking to the perennial
city council candidate
about the nature of violence
She asks if abolition is possible
without it
She's confused when I ask why that matters
She leaves before I get an answer

Pace around through most of the moon
Some sleep, some huddle together
and talk in hushed tones
to not wake others
Security starts doing rounds
at 4:30 or so
To let us know the cops asked us to move by 5
And that we should comply
I'm too tired to be annoyed
At least I can get breakfast
on the way home
Bojangles I think

3.

On security roles

Kill the radical security team in your head

Destroy the part of your brain

that thinks it wise to partition vigilance

responsibility

to designated groups

of always mostly men

with a control complex

We should all be capable

of defending ourselves

defending each other

I don't want some

crew of ex marines

having any say in where my body goes

or how I use it

Tell me not to level a fascist

one more fucking time

and the next one's for you

They'll sooner hand you over to the pigs

for hammering at cobblestone

than keep you safe from

whatever threats actually exist

I don't feel safer

with them here

I don't need any more eyes

watching me

4.

There is a blind rage that often accompanies
the visual of authority impressing itself
on the bodies of those you care about
Where the boundary of what you will risk
begins to shift beneath your feet
Not for bravery,
but because you can't stand
to watch

Shouts become more pointed
Gestures more threatening
Eyes dart from badge to badge
scanning for an opening
Before you realize
You're in their sights as well

As soon as they put a hand
on your shoulder and wrist
It all comes down to instinct
And you spin out of one
then out of two
But the third takes away your legs
and your face kisses pavement

Boots circle round as a knee
flirts with cracking your neck
and your hip
and you lose the day

5.

I'm too tall for the back of the cruiser
I'm not even that tall
Shins are forced into hard corners
Start to bleed, match my wrists
We make it to the carport of the jail
a dozen other cars not far behind
They leave me to sit in a miserable heap
until they get their stories straight

The door opens but I'm still wedged
Can't get to my feet
I slump out, onto concrete
Uniform in the punisher mask
apologizes for my wrists
said they were rougher
than they needed to be
Can't help but laugh
It would've made a good joke
if he intended it that way

6.

For the love of god
stop fucking talking
I'd rather sit here in silence
than hear your attempts to buddy up
to the pigs who just kicked our shit in
I know you're scared and I'm sorry
but please
Please
shut up

7.

Six hours before I'm processed
Given a court date
released on 10k unsecured
Lucky they're just charging me with riot
 lucky this city has an image to protect
Can't be seen keeping protestors in jail
Gotta keep those cells free
for the real criminals
for the regular folks without support
who it's easier to disappear

8.

Still have blood on my wrists
when he presses my hand on the scanner
taking down my fingerprints
Everything is digital now
no more ink and paper
Missed when they took my mugshot, didn't look up
News will show it later

The routine of it all makes me nauseous
Lightheaded, dizzy
I hate this and I hate them
The cops and magistrates
I hate the sound the doors make
when they lock and unlock
I hate the fluorescent bulbs
and the tile floor
I'll hate it till it's ash
or till I'm dirt

9.

The streets, same concrete
look different day to day
Shape or form stays constant
but the framing changes
Whether barricades or open lanes
a garbage truck slowing traffic
or an armored car shutting it down altogether
Fresh glass replaces
plywood boards replace
broken glass
The bodega is open
regardless of the circumstances

10.

I walk around town
because the weather is nice
for the first time in a while
Tiptoe atop stone walls
imagine I'm up high on a wire
overlooking the rush hour crowd
A breeze blows back my cap
and I stumble out of fantasy
No use fighting gravity
So I return to earth
unharmed
to rejoin the crowd

AUGUST

1.

For weeks the momentum wanes
Tires spin in the mud
Frustrations spill over as projects
fail to take flight
or crash and burn only seconds
after liftoff
We live in the dead time
Each second that passes feels wasted
Too busy avoiding reflection on
the moments prior to make
use of the breathing space

Temporal Agoraphobia

Some try to force the issue
Make attempts to cultivate
that which can only arise in nature
Modern agriculture incapable of producing
And so we gnaw at bones, exhausted
Trying to squeeze water from stone

Our job cannot be
to wave our hands and materialize
the collapse from dust in sunbeams
We can only build relation to one another
Prime ourselves to make use of
new found fissures
drive our stakes into their hearts
during those wonderful moments
when they are exposed

2.

It happens again
and the city turns out
not as many as May
but enough to make them worry
to make them scared
Preemptive curfew and everything
Flags get burned, fences get shook
words are exchanged with cops not yet in riot gear
but they will be

Crowd moves fast to the jail
Chants of love and hope
Cheers for the folks inside
that these walls fall soon
Street art graces a blank canvas
across the street, calls for
cages to be emptied
and for revenge

We stay for a long time
in this empty lot
Too many people
and too much energy
to justify dispersing
but nobody willing to take the next step
And that's okay
More time to focus on our friends in the windows
make this night for them

3.

Movement in my periphery
towards front door of the jail
slipperiest person I've ever seen
All black
Brick in hand as the door swings open
My guts fall out when I see the barrel point through
No time to retreat
Don't think they'd want to anyway
Close my eyes before the bang
Sure I'm about to witness an execution
Crowd scatters up the street
but dude is alright
Spooked a bit
but no holes from what I can see

4.

Flashbang or firework
Not all that much difference
in how they function
Mirrored tools
one for us
one for them
Ours singe fingers
make colors of the night
Theirs blow off limbs
rupture ear drums
Either way
folks are gonna run when they go off

5.

Starts no different than any one prior
Black has become an aesthetic
for the university students to wear
while they put on their performance as subversives
for their three and half credit hours
The megaphone echos a militant chant
while the streets remain orderly

until the march back towards main street

A trash can tips over
spontaneously combusts
Barricades around an old courthouse
are tested, thrown, discarded
Windows are stress tested, relieved of their frames
New art is put on display
While the speakers boom

The university students don't know
where they should run to
Terrified when confronted with
the reality of the ephemera
with which they've covered themselves
But all I care about
This city
will not be called polite
in the papers tomorrow

6.

Security guard
 in heroic effort
tries to defend the honor
of a store front
Pulls his taser
on a teenager
Too busy to notice
his car
falling apart

7.

A bottle of wine
is not part of my typical
protest gear, but
who am I to judge
Not like my cliff bars
are any more useful
when the rocks start flying

8.

Eat dinner, watch the sunset
from the highest parking garage in town
Large fries and two cheeseburgers
Diet coke, no ice
Car radio doing its best to provide a soundtrack
Venus shines through early
Through the pinks and purples
The breeze is nice,
Old Friend
I hope you're well

9.

He makes me smile,
mom,
there's nothing else to say

SEPTEMBER

1.

The march is short
crowd thinner after the students
got scared off the week before
But size doesn't always fortell energy
In minutes rocks and fireworks
pelt the façade of a jail
While folks inside wave
Cheer us on

News says at least three window panes
will need to be replaced
That the glass is still breaking to sand
as the reporter tries to explain
the meaning of the protest
and how many fear the violence
of a broken building
Distracts from the message

The message seemed clear to me

2.

I look across the porch and tell her
we aren't going anywhere
No matter what happens
That it's okay to be afraid
about the future
They have power, and they can use it
But we'll always be her people
That she's not alone

3.

For the third time in as many weeks
downtown is made a carnival
of hammers, stones, and spray paint
Fires burn
Storefronts busted out
Messages left to be read
by the morning

4.

The mayor holds a conference
to unveil the truth he has learned
of the vandalism that took place
the night before
His police have alerted him
that the vandals are all
white folks from out of town

And the liberals spring into action
as they see their bat sign
projected onto the clouds
Everyone writes a blog post
about how their city is peaceful
and that this damage hurts the movement
that they will never, ever, bleed for

They're afraid of liberation
and now they can mask their fear
as pragmatism
as allyship

5.

To the liberal business owners
saddened to wake and find your storefront
renovated to an open air design
I offer you my sincerest wishes that
you are able to replace that inventory and repair your window pane
as soon as possible
So that crowbars and hammers don't grow rusted in their disuse
So that arms remain accurate
when stones are thrown
That pockets remain full
from the spoils of your register and shelves
Don't look here for sympathy
for your struggling business
in these trying times
Chew on the dust from your broken mortar
and kick rocks

6.

The river keeps flowing
Every time we reach the spot
where we eat our lunch
and talk shit about the projects
we can't seem to keep afloat
I half expect the water to be still
to have lost its inertia from the week before
to look up at the heavens and call out for respite

Yet each week, it flows
carries away my words downstream
as I offer exasperation into the ether
Let the turtles make sense of it

7.

You were in a dream last night
tapped me on the shoulder
and I turned, confused
but it was good to see you
for however long it was
and however far from reality
I wake up to realize

8.

She calls me on her way through town
asks for a black coffee
We meet up in a grocery store parking lot
and it feels just as it should
Just how she feels
I think she's in love with me
but that's not something I'm going to ask about
and I sure as hell won't admit it first
So I think I'll never know
not before it's a memory to laugh at in passing

She looks in my back seat
through the window
Says she's trying to get to know me
without asking questions
And I smile, big, goofy grin
She has to go, can't stay much longer
Needs to convince herself not to
come back to my place
She wins the argument with herself
Gets a plant in a wine bottle from her car
Apologizes for not removing the label
asks me to take care of it

And I have
It sits on my desk by the window
Only living thing in my apartment
most days

OCTOBER

1.

It was christmas time
when they were evicted
Season betrayed by calendar pages
and decorations left around
A large, jolly, santa head
still hanging in the doorway
above a half-decayed rat

Discarded toys mark a child's room
puzzle pieces and broken crayons silent
on a shelf in the closet
A few shirts hung above
whispers of the colors they used to be

Holes in the walls, sink smashed in
copper's been stripped
An old tv, bright yellow, cathode ray
Serves as a doorstop
Not broken
Just left behind

2.

Photographs are caught in the couch cushions
Some capture posed family members
Smiles surrounding a central figure
others quiet, serene even
A pile of wrapped presents
in a lonesome corner of a party venue
No sign of anyone nearby
save for the photographer

We guess at the reasons
for the pile of pictures
in this long-abandoned place
A retirement party
a funeral
maybe a birthday
The detritus in this room
damp and torn
was someone's life once
now a pile we walk through
looking out for shards of glass

3.

A tree grows through a hole in the roof
in total defiance of our arrogance
that the foundations we lay
will forever be ours to claim
But a tree grows through a hole in the roof
and its branches bend in the wind

4.

I keep a bike pump in my car
in case of a slow leak
in a tire
and I need to fill it up enough
to make it home or to a shop
A man at a gas station notices
me pumping away
filling up the
back right tire
Says It'll take you all day
Asks if I need change for the air compressor
I say it's alright, I'm almost done
He laughs and shrugs, says I'm crazy
and walks away
I like to think I gave him
a story to tell someone at home that night
Some weird ass dude
filling up his tire
with a bike pump

5.

In my dreams I write sometimes
and conduct symphonies
I play the cello and sing in a sweet sweet tenor
And it smells of cardamom

6.

Our traumas become badges
to be offered before the altar
of our connection to one another
Traded and bartered for sympathy or care
in a ritual no less grotesque
than the experiences they stem from
For if our grief
manifests itself in any way other than
the anticipated mask
then there is nothing to be offered

But to invoke that mask, a risk itself
To lift the veil of ignorance
clouding the question
that if we were to ever cry out
cold, alone, hungry
Would we be heard by those
who we wish would clothe and feed us
Or will we be confronted with the reality
of our own isolation and abandonment
or simply the ineptitude of those from whom we desire care

The unceasing paradox
of yearning to be soothed and nurtured
without suffering the ordeal of being witnessed
And so we keep our faces clean
Keep the mask in the drawer
Rise and sing to the morning

NOVEMBER

1.

They say we need to vote
Get our mail-in ballots
to let our voices be heard
in the most important decision
of our lives
They say
on the TV
But they're wrong
I already made the most important
decision of my life
five years ago
on the top floor of a parking garage

2.

Drew up some flyers
for an action the night of
Rip the pics from some
press photographer's twitter
He took them during the summer
during the riots
He's mad that we used them
Says it's co-opting, against copyright
I can't stop laughing at him
thinking I give a shit about copyright
So I make more
and send them to friends
in other cities

3.

“Vote for him today, hold his feet to the fire tomorrow”
Why just his feet?

4.

Two hundred turn out in the streets
on a bitter night
when we were supposed to be watching
history unfold
with advertisement breaks
Banners were solid
and the city is on lockdown
If the cops are following us all night
so be it
Less time they’re in the neighborhoods
harassing some kids

5.

Sat outside the jail
Same way I've done a dozen times
And I'm tired, and bored
Someone brings a box of sandwiches
and a crowd gathers
I pace along the wall
of a parking garage
It's 2 in the morning
and I work at 10
so I'll head out soon
but I'll stay another 15

6.

They walk down the driveway
papers in hand
as ghosts

7.

Decry kids held in cages on Monday
Celebrate the opening of refurbished
youth migrant overflow facilities on Tuesday
How do you keep your gums from bleeding
keep your bowels intact
while swallowing fistfuls of glass

8.

It's going to blow their minds
when the riots return
before the scarcity even sets in
No, they'll be back sooner than that
Your cops can't help themselves
fingers always reaching for the trigger

DECEMBER

1.

Alarm goes off in darkness
I can hear birds outside
Eyes adjust as I pull on jeans and socks
grab my bag I packed the night before
She rolls over on the couch, says good morning
 spoken word sounds strange at 4am
Step out to the car and take a moment
to look up at the stars
Pick them up on the way
Long drive made easier with company

Pass Richmond at sunrise
She turns to the window
“The sky is beautiful”
What does a red sun in morning mean

Park in the city, less trouble than expected
and walk to the metro
Empty for a weekend
 save for a few pigeons
but there is a plague going round
heard it's killed half a million

Make it to the plaza
but don't look the part
not allowed inside till a friend makes a call
So we sit on the sidewalk
eating egg sandwiches
I look up, at least the sky is beautiful

Confrontations with cops start early
and happen often
They grab a shield and move to the front line
I have a hand on their bag, ready to pull
She's nearby, gets sprayed
Not sure how I avoided that

Move back down the street
eat another sandwich
Find a place to piss
already my back hurts
I lie down and stare
as the clouds transform and translate out of view
And the sky is beautiful

Cops move in for a snatch and grab
Can't tell why but they pull a few
folks out of the crowd
and the crowd responds with rocks
Someone draws blood

A megaphone calls for a march
to meet another group at a nearby park
It feels bad, wrong to leave
dangerous for many reasons
but folks are going
and staying here alone feels worse
Sun is setting, clouds are red again
She points and offers
“The sky is beautiful”

Rest of the night is a blur
March cut off by riot cops
an unprepared shield wall
faces the wrong way
boxes itself in
Small scuffles throughout

We make it back to the car
and stop for food on the way home
 ease some personal homesickness
Lean on the trunk of the car
Count constellations while they talk
And they're both asleep the last two hours
The road is dark
but we make it home
Fall into bed, 4am
dream about the sky

2.

Visiting a friend on my way back north
Catching up under the awning of the bathrooms
of a small park
Rained all morning
 still raining
These geese want our bagels
and I swear they are raptors
when they tilt their heads back to roar
But there's no way I'm giving up my lunch
So I roar right back
And they laugh at me
waddle away out of boredom

3.

Three of us find logs to sit on
in the open clear cut
to watch the stars fall to earth
Geminids I think they're called
Something like that

For a while I miss out
Neck growing sore from the crooked angle
But then I catch a few
lightning bugs in the ionosphere
burning up between my fingers
Not mine to keep
Nobody's to keep

4.

I didn't recognize how much I missed them
until I was driving away
back down into Pennsylvania
over a bridge in Phillipsburg
Something about the river
and I wept
heavy, wet
all the way to Harrisburg
Drying up in time
to cross another bridge
across another river

5.

I should be doing work
Have a meeting in the morning
about what I've gotten done
but I can't bring myself to
turn on the computer
to give up on this rest
They can't touch me until tomorrow
so tonight
they don't
exist

JANUARY

1.

We're up on the railroad tracks
looking for scrap metal the cars kick off
to slam together
To make some noise for the folks inside
A kid burns his hand on a bottle rocket
for the first of three times that night
Forget to bring the bottles
Remember them for next year
The folks inside start waving
Towels, clothes, signs, whatever they have on hand
to press up against their windows
We're encouraged to be louder
Smacking the ties we find against the tracks, shouting, singing
Someone sets off a birthday present
from South Carolina and I start smiling
Each eruption illuminates the side of
the concrete box
People are drunk and they're laughing
They're happy even if just for tonight
A roman candle makes it into the carport and
everyone cheers
A guard closes his blinds and we boo
No cops come out
They don't need to
It's just (the end of the world) a party

2.

Cop came in through the back fence
and the party scattered
like teenagers fleeing a house show
left the guy riding highest to talk
his way through what ended up being
a mild request to turn down the music
We're not too bright
but we're pretty damn fast
when we wanna be

3.

Resolutions:

Destroy the forward progress of time

4.

I don't really like to dance
My body feels uncoordinated and too long
in spots, too heavy in others
I can't keep rhythm and I never
know where to look
I worry about people watching
 or about people not watching
And spinning makes me dizzy
But I think
I'd like to dance
on the ruins of their cop shops
on the rubble of their churches
and of their altars
You would be there too I think
I would laugh and clap as you move
and there is music

5.

We talk and shoot a basketball
around this makeshift court
Basket found at some dilapidated school
out in the woods
Learn about cycles in the scene
patterns well worn by now
harmful and severe
ignored
inconvenient to look them in the eye

So people keep getting hurt
They burn out or burn up
They leave, in one way or another
but the scene stays
and it stays the same

It needs to die

6.

We sit by the bridge
Four then three of us
Try to work out a contingency plan
for if things go to hell
on a tighter line than expected
Make a list of supplies
we should pick up when we get the chance
Gauze and bandages
Should look into radios

7.

We stand along the river
She asks my opinion of this space
if she's crazy for leaving
for feeling like she didn't fit in
that she was excluded
I say it makes sense
that I see the same patterns
the same people stitching them together
that she isn't crazy at all
or if she is, so am I
That I'm sad about the state of things
but she's right to feel these ways

I ask for her advice
on how to navigate relationships
Boundaries with people you care for
when they exist in spaces
you won't engage with
can't engage with
She says it's hard
No easy answer
but if you truly care
just be there as best you can
for as long as you can stand it
Trust your gut
and your reads on people
and take care of yourself

8.

Each day we fail in our promises to one another
Plans fall through
commitments break
and people suffer for it
The same few are left to
pick up the pieces
Do their best to bear the brunt of crisis
The philosophers of the scene can't
be expected to muddy their hands
in such frivolous work
No, they have French essayists
to translate
and podcasts to record
trust funds to manage
Yet they retain the audacity
to believe themselves capable
of defining the scene
I'd sooner kick out their knees
than take them seriously
The people that care
are the ones who show up
 or at least fucking try
If the scene isn't with them
then what's the fucking point

9.

We walk along the tracks at night
She says her eyes
work just fine
Doesn't need a flashlight
in the dark
but I do
Cut through a field of old
stumps in between puddles
I slip on wet ground
and slide, maintain my balance
down to the creek
follow the sound back home

10.

I used to visit them at the bar
on Friday nights, after working out
Drop off french fries
talk till close, help them kill time
Keep them from reading whichever
nihilistic author they were working through
that week
We'd catch up and chat with other friends
who swing by
It was nice
and it's gone now
till lockdown lets up
maybe forever

FEBRUARY

1.

From the streets to the courthouse
to the meetings with lawyers and without lawyers
Solidarity is replaced with excuses
Arguments offered in bad faith
when we don't even know we're offering them in bad faith
We say the deal isn't bad we
just have egos too large we
need to cut our losses and move on to better uses of our time

But the losses we cut are our principles
our movements

They're our friends and loved ones
our co-conspirators

They are the people taken from us
who we swore to bring home

The losses we cut are ourselves

All it takes is a few months under the mildest of thumbs
before we sell out
before we view ourselves as separate from the struggle
a city away

Before we throw our hands in the sky and cry out
“Enough”

Before we try to justify our own cowardice or exhaustion
We can't face our fears

Instead we claim we're making the pragmatic decision

Just keep me out of jail

I'll help you recuperate your carceral state

Just keep me out of jail

I'll give you your photo op

Just keep me out of jail

I'll sell out myself

sell out my friends

sell out our future

When this is all said and done I'll carve a tattoo across my face
down my neck
across my chest and spine
so that my position is never mistaken
“NO FUCKING DEALS”

2.

I have no choice to practice my beliefs in a courtroom
The second I step across the threshold
remove my hat
rise and sit on command
I have sacrificed something of myself
My only choice is to make them sacrifice more
to make them bleed
to make them bleed out from their necks
from their wrists
their badges
their robes
Until they are a flood
Until they are a drought

3.

Court is like church insofar as
wherever there is a group of people
seeking to enact sanctified violence, court can exist
In the absence of a courthouse they'd sooner
crucify you on the highest hill
than let you evade justice

4.

Make me a judge
and I'll swing my gavel
Smash the fingers of the District Attorney
so that they can no longer point at the accused
for the jury

Let them cry out in pain
the way so many families cry out
when their loved ones
are marched away for the last time
in a long time
or the last time

I'll crack the bailiff's skull
toss his gun to a child in the audience
Tell her to have fun
sing a song for the bullets
Give them names
as she fires them off

Make me a judge
I'll make a circus of the courtroom
Tossing peanuts and cotton candy
to the crowd
I'll burn my robe
walk naked through the halls
let the sprinklers shower me
Soap and shampoo down the stairwell

Make me a judge
Watch the lights go out

5.

6.

It's late
I'm awake thinking about the
time I held her as she sobbed
and heaved
sick at the absurdity of a friend's court case
next date coming up soon
I just rock her through it
saying "I know"
and "it is what it is"
that "we'll get them through it"
But for that night she was lost
and I watched her struggle
to find the edge of the woods
where the sunlight can reach
That was years ago now
but I think about it
when I'm lost in the woods
and sobbing

7.

If I hand you the knife
could you carve me gills
so that I might finally breathe
in this brackish mud

8.

I worry he feels like he's on call
my personal crisis confidante
For random park meetups at noon
on a Wednesday
to talk about bullshit until I
feel sane enough to drive back home
and be alone again

I worry I wear him down
wear him thin
That my company becomes a burden
He assures me that isn't the case
and I try to believe him

9.

She struggles across the train bridge
pleading with her legs to move
one foot at a time
Can't look down
which makes it all the more difficult
to spot the next step
It's endearing how hard she's trying
but I think we'll ford the stream
on the way back

10.

Hold my hand and confide in me
your proudest moment
a singular point in which the world clicked for you
Let me see your lips curl at their corners
as you think back through your catalogue
of photographs wheatpasted to your skull
Embarrassments and triumphs
Romances and naivete
It's hard right now
I know
but we'll find those moments again
or make something new
out of the cloth scraps and rags
the fires haven't reached
I've been meaning to learn how to sew

11.

If I see you face in the morning
light through the window of the car
 sun ray highlighting bridge of nose
 accents a thin smile
 the day is already won
 and I can relax

12.

It came on subtle
and I couldn't tell you
when I realized in full
or where it originated
but I want someone,
maybe you
to bring me flowers
when they bloom
in spring

MARCH

1.

The horizon will always bend
It has no choice in the matter
nature of sphere is all

And the sun will always get lost
just across the seam
Finding its way home soon enough

And I will always be here
As flesh or as dust
helping the flowers grow

2.

You would lay your head in my lap
pull my fingers to your forehead
nails graze the roots as they comb through hair
And I'd sing to you
any song you ask for
as you close your eyes and drift off
letting the weight of the day roll
off your shoulders and onto the sheets
I'd lean and kiss between your eyes
and your chest rises
quiet and slow
We would sit, hold hands
until it passes through us

3.

I refuse to work, ever again
I want to run barefoot
on the summer grass at dusk
catching fireflies and letting them go

They aren't mine to keep

I want to drive to the ocean on a Tuesday
only leave when we decide it's time for mountains
I want to drink from
a quiet stream while I eat breakfast
and listen to the birds

I'm tired of waking up each morning
to this world of absurdity
to this universe of abstraction
I want to use my hands
build something for someone
Let the callouses harden and rip
Let me shiver at the expanse of the milky way
from a sleeping bag on the shore of a lake

I'm gonna smash my computer to bits
drill straight through the hard drive
microwave the motherboard
I'll get in my car, head to the coast
Push it off a cliff, into the water
and start walking

4.

They say power cedes nothing without a demand
I tend to agree as I've never seen
power offer anything willingly
So take note, all powers that be
here are my demands
I'll try to stick to practicality:

1. A tooth from every cop who dared step on the street in the summer of fire; preferably a molar or canine
2. An ear from every politician who offered to “listen” to the centuries old trauma while brandishing a whip behind their back
3. The kneecap of every prison guard who walks out of work each day while leaving the family they stole from us in a cage each night
4. I want every bar from every cell window
5. I want the bullets from your gun
6. Give me the tires from your cruiser
7. Give up your tie and badge
8. I want the shirt off your back
9. I want flames
10. I need a downpour
11. Give me the nuclear codes
12. and a tank
13. a helicopter
14. a boat
15. I want my friends to be okay
16. I want community, real community
not just dead ended cliques
17. Burn down the cities
18. Give back the land
19. I want my mom to smile more
20. I want my sister to drink less
21. I want to wake up tomorrow with no memory you ever existed
22. I want to wake up tomorrow

5.

The water runs hot
Dirt pools near the drain

I put hands to my face
touching cheeks
One rises up, over my mother's eyes
reaches the crest of the forehead
pushes back thinning hair
The other moves to cover mouth
lips cracked and thin
surrounded by unkempt brush
I trace vessels down my neck
Let fingers run along collarbone to shoulders

One sits higher than the other
from a kink in my back
kyphosis

Let arms hang at sides for a minute
Notice how the view changes
inhale
exhale

Look at the scars on hands
of burns and cuts
of an acid spill in high school chemistry
of a chipmunk bite
Bend over to give hands access to wide thighs
and trick knees
well worn, crack on command
Find the groove in the shin bone
excavated by an unfortunate park bench
Reach feet, swollen from the day's walking
Calloused soles cover where the nail went through
a decade and a half ago

In a minute or two
the water runs clear